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Introduction to the issue on visibility of social classes, representations of class structures and relations.

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Visuality of Social Classes: Structures and Relations

The story behind the photograph on the cover is particularly complex. We see a hand holding a picture of a hand holding a drill bit. Diving straight into the center of this *mise-en-abyme*: the archival photograph was taken in the workshop of acclaimed Mexican painter and mural artist David Alfaro Siqueiros (1896–1974). In 2012, German artist Christian Jankowski found it and used it to create a series of twenty-eight photographs showing employees of the Sala de Arte Público Siqueiros and the Proyectos Monclova gallery in Mexico City – ranging from the executive director and the curator, to custodians, drivers, and receptionists – holding Siqueiros’s picture. One of the photographs in the series, the one featuring the director, found itself on the cover of the first of two *Widok* issues that will explore the equally convoluted relationship between class and representation.

According to the author, the series, titled *Studies for a Monument to the Bourgeois Working Class*, aims to expose the inconsistencies in the position of Siqueiros himself – who was both champion of the working class, eager to embrace radical political solutions (he took part in the failed attempt to assassinate Leon Trotsky), and a *bon vivant* reluctant to turn away the patronage of rich business magnates. But even more interesting than the contradictions between his ideology and both his lifestyle and the provenance of the funding that fueled his artistic work, was the somewhat incidental peek behind the



Christian Jankowski, *Studies for a Monument to the Bourgeois Working Class*, 2012, courtesy of the artist

scenes of his own artistic effort, that is the creation – in this case the painting – of representations of the working class. Held out before the artist, the slender, bejeweled hand with painted nails presents the drill bit, which likely soon found itself blown up in one of the artists' murals, in line with the then prevailing iconographic framework that associated the working class with the underground, the drilling of tunnels and extractive labor (simultaneously offering a visual interpretation of the social ladder metaphor). In the ancillary picture, Siqueiros coincidentally captured the process of transforming a work tool into an aesthetic object and a symbol of a social class. To create this template for his "powerful" image of the working class, he took a photo that exposed the fundamental attributes of social classes: their relationality and interdependence. Jankowski not only points out the picture's ancillary, supporting status – the missing link of visual production – but, by rephotographing it, delves deeper into the matter of class differences. By producing a series of black-and-white photographs – intended to be hung next to one another on a gallery wall, in identical frames – Jankowski provokes us to identify (also by way of comparison) specific hallmarks of class position. Where did the gallery director get the scar on her hand and is her ring any different from the one worn by the custodian? How about the watches worn by the artist and the security guard? Are the hands of people in executive positions more delicate and better groomed than those of the blue-collar personnel? The longer we look at the photographs, the more aware we grow of just how dangerous such a method of determining class is and how biased and biasing our gaze can be – of the risky proximity between a class-conscious and classist gaze.

Jankowski's work centers the belief that crafting depictions of class structure, class identities, and the relationships between individual classes is quite an ambiguous challenge.

This ambivalence grows even more prominent when we situate alongside the *Studies* the three-dimensional piece recreated from the photograph found in the depths of an archive. Compared to the pictured original, the

Monument to the Bourgeois

Working Class sculpture, made of cheap materials considered unworthy of genuine monuments (including cardboard, wood, PVC, and plastic), seems anachronistic and vaguely monstrous. Brought to the fore by the photographs, the class contradictions are lost in the strange medium of the monument; the remaining irony is concentrated in the title, which blends two classes that Marx's original interpretation framed as strictly inimical to one another.

Engaging in efforts to craft representation of class is necessary, however, if we want to understand class beyond its abstract social studies definition. This notion is the premise behind Fredric Jameson's classic essay, the Polish translation of which, penned by Jędrzej K. Brzeziński, is featured in this issue of *Widok*. The author of *Class and Allegory in Contemporary Mass Culture* explicitly dismisses the notion that class is dead, but simultaneously admits that the very representability of class in late capitalism is a key task that calls for additional elaboration. It becomes visible only from the perspective of "that whole area of personal fantasy, collective storytelling, and narrative figurability." Classes, Jameson writes, must "become in some sense characters in their own right" – only then will they



Christian Jankowski, *Studies for a Monument to the Bourgeois Working Class*, 2012, courtesy of the artist

become tangible figures of our social lives. Analyzing the flagship title of the American New Wave, the 1975 film *Dog Day Afternoon*, Jameson demonstrates where to find these “class characters”: not in the explicitly political essence of representation, but in its structure, analogies, and metaphors, all of which process, in myriad ways, the “raw feed” of the deeply political character of everyday life under late capitalism.

The **Closeup** section features a series of articles exploring the many different dimensions of class relationships and structures present in visual representations. Krzysztof Świrek's *Class Difference: Symbolic, Imaginary and Real*

centers the relationality inherent in representations of that difference. Drawing on the three registers of Lacanian psychoanalysis, the author identifies its myriad aspects manifested within representations: symbolic structures differ from imaginary figures, while the register of the real reveals itself in representations of aporia and trauma.

The other two essays in the section problematize class in former socialist societies of the Eastern bloc. In *Patriarchal Primitivism. Dying Peasant Women and the Soviet Anti-Developmental Turn*, Joy Neumeyer examines the “funereal” representations of peasant women in late Soviet art and cinema. The figure of the peasant woman is used in these representations to symbolize the crisis of modernity – within them, the peasant class serves as an allegory for what was lost in the course of the rapid and ruthless modernization of Eastern European societies. In *Film and the Politics of Negative Community. Krzysztof Kieślowski's Dialectic in the Late 1970s Polish People's Republic*, the author, Dominic Leppla, examines the work of the renowned Polish film director, looking for new



Christian Jankowski, *Monument to the Bourgeois Working Class*, 2012, courtesy of the artist

forms of politicality, and argues that the conflicts pictured in Kieślowski's films translate into new forms of class solidarity, founded not in the utopia of emancipation, but in the negativity of opposition to the social reality of the Polish People's Republic.

The essays penned by Dorota Olko and Olympia Contopidis, in turn, interrogate the present day, reflecting the opacity of contemporary representations of class: as class language is gradually eliminated from public discourse (and our common imaginary), the pressures of domination, expressed in the disapproval and denunciation of practices and aesthetics espoused by subordinate classes, grow ever more overbearing. In *"Not the Tracksuit, Please, It Sends the Wrong Message." The Role of Bodily Representation in Shaping Subjectivity in the Working Classes*, Dorota Olko explores the complex relationship between bodily norms and the subjectivity of the working class. To justify what the author calls their "claim to respectability," representatives of the working classes must embrace dominant norms and simultaneously elude them. This complex dance involves the demonstrative rejection of aesthetic anti-patterns disparaged by popular culture (of the *dresiarz* and *blachara*, the latter of which is a local incarnation of the car bunny) and dissociation from those situated on the lowest rungs of the ladder, the marginalized. In the last essay in the section, Olympia Contopidis analyzes two photographic projects – of Richard Billingham and LaToya Ruby Frazier – that explore the lives of public housing dwellers. The topic selected by the author sits at the heart of contemporary concerns surrounding class representation. Residents of public housing projects, once considered a part of the working class, are today often portrayed as a marginalized community, "helpless" and unhappy, in the best case in need of help and, in the worst, calling for discipline and punishment. As neither a compassionate nor a derisive lens will produce a full picture of the complex relationship between the fate of these subjects and the broader relationships of (class) power, the author cautions that the points of view underpinning

any representation must always be closely scrutinized to identify those paternalistic depictions that “aim downward” to either move the viewer or cement their sense of superiority. The last two essays in *Closeup* illustrate clearly that visual culture not only describes class relationships, but plays a key role in their definition.

Perhaps no other area of cultural production illustrates this better than fashion. The showcase of Tomasz Armada’s work in **Viewpoint** constitutes the first such comprehensive review of his designs in photographic form. In the companion essay, Agata Zborowska spotlights the complex interplay of contexts that Armada’s work is embedded in. Alluding to the established “folkish” canon, the designer strongly emphasizes the new visual codes produced by the dwellers of post-transformation housing projects. Another key accent in his work is the distinct Eastern streak, conceived here not as a strong identity, but a weak, peripheral aesthetic, especially palpable whenever the designer recycles “scraps” or second-hand garments imported en masse into Poland from its Western neighbors.

In her *Theory of the Gimmick*, Sianne Ngai proposed to examine capitalism through the lens of the eponymous gimmick, something that is both fascinating and mediocre, substandard. It is nice to have, but it only simulates the value assigned to rightful items or goods. In conversation with Ngai (**Perspectives**), Magda Szcześniak stresses the class aspects of the titular category. As such, gimmick appears to be surprisingly close to the counterfeit, a familiar staple of the post-socialist transition period, which bridged two different class realms: the local neighborhood bazaar, where vendors hawked tracksuits with four stripes, with contemporary marketing stunts employed by exclusive fashion houses. Today, a logo spelling “Guccy” is scandalizing only to out-of-the-loop middle-class snobs, who failed to notice that the counterfeit aesthetic has already become a part of the fashion mainstream.

The **Snapshots** section includes three reviews. Engaging with Andrzej Marzec's 2021 book *Antropocień. Filozofia i estetyka po końcu świata* [Anthroposhadow. Philosophy and Aesthetics in the Wake of the End of the World] on a variety of levels, Aleksandra Brylska traces the many meanings that the notion of shadow may carry with regard to the climate catastrophe, an essential context in Marzec's book. Mankind continues to cast an ever longer shadow on the natural world, Marzec argues, but it is also in the shade that we seek refuge from the effects of global warming, Brylska adds. Mateusz Salwa takes a closer look at Marta Olesik's 2020 treatise, *Kwadrat przebity włócznią. René Descartes, Georges de La Tour, nowoczesne doświadczenie ciała i zmysłowa praktyka abstrakcji* [A Speared Square. René Descartes, Georges de La Tour, the Modern Experience of the Body and the Sensual Practice of Abstraction], and finds inside it an excellent example of how closely the languages of philosophy and literature may be tied when they describe art. Salwa also centers the complexity of Olesik's project, not only on the conceptual level, but also in terms of language and literary style. The relationships between representation and economy are explored in Leigh Clare La Berge's 2019 book *Wages Against Artwork*, which Torsten Andreasen examines against his own broader inquiry into the many different aspects of the role of representation in the creation of economic discourse. In the reviewed book, particular weight is given to representations of artistic labor. To some degree, Andreasen's review rounds off the issue, almost entirely dedicated to the uneasy relationship between structure and representation.

Although they are real, class structure and relationships are impossible to "depict" directly; they may be noticed and identified, however, using the proper tools. In such a case, however, it may appear that contrary to popular opinion, structures do not just "walk the streets," even though the modern

public sphere is radically different from that, in which the “status” of an individual was evident at first glance.

Łukasz Zaremba, a part of *Widok* from its very inception, has recently stepped down from the editorial team. In his capacity as editor, Zaremba helped put together several dozen issues of *Widok*, including four as managing editor (*Formatting of Late Television, Invisible Labor, Digital Darkness* and *The Return of Landscape*). The themed issues combined Łukasz’s personal interests with sharp diagnoses of the issues and challenges faced by visual culture today, while his insight into research on visuality deeply affected the direction and perspective of the magazine. A big thank-you to Łukasz for the many years spent working on *Widok* – we are all looking forward to publishing his contributions in the future.

Editorial Team

